

## INQUIRY INTO FOOD PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

Food production in Australia and the question of how to produce food that is: (a) affordable to consumers; (b) viable for production by farmers; and (c) of sustainable impact on the environment.

## PURPOSE OF FOOD PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

*"The key purpose of food and farming is—or should be—to advance the health and well-being of the population."*[1]

Tim Lang and Geof Rayner

The inquiry must consider health and environment by linking production to consumption. Governments should promote a view that what matters is not just what people eat but also how food is produced and how equitably it is distributed and consumed [1]. Linking 'food production to consumption' can achieve public health goals and environmental goals [D Barling Centre for food Policy, London.] There is a need to integrate both strands and not address them separately.

*"Food policies deliver large quantities of food relatively safely, but they are failing to deliver healthy diets"*[2]

Tim Lobstein, *the Food Commission UK*

The enquiry should consider the development of an integrated Australian food and nutrition policy, with three main components: supply of sufficient amounts of food (food security); the provision of food free from contamination (food safety); and the provision of a healthy diet available to all (nutritional quality).

### Recommendation 1

**The food production analysis should include supply chain mapping of:**

- **cost analysis\business**
- **food safety\quality**
- **procurements**
- **agriculture and international developments**
- **environmental sustainable development, and importantly**
- **food security assessment (with diet quality for health as the outcome).**
- **health impact assessment (with diet quality for health as the outcome).**

The vision for the Australian food system, *"a safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainable food supply accessible to all"* has been articulated since the early 1990s [3, 4]. The Australian Food and Nutrition Policy was developed in 1979 and revised in 1992 [4]. The key principles of the policy were: social justice, quality food supply, community participation and accountability, food system and wider interaction and ecologically sustainable development. The policy was to be implemented through intersectoral strategies consistent with the dietary guidelines for Australians. Political commitment facilitated the implementation of the policy and lead to considerable financial commitment (\$5.55 million between 1992 and 1996), and stakeholder engagement (government, private and non- government) [4].

National government nutrition policies implemented with appropriate research, political will and financial support have been shown to direct and implement dietary guidelines and contribute to dietary and health gains [5] [6]. Countries need to

consider global influences on food and nutrition policy [6], particularly in relation to food production, distribution, advertising and promotion. Nutrition policy also has significant implications for agriculture and trade [6]. There is an increasing emphasis on the need for food policy to support the production, access, promotion and equitable consumption of health promoting foods [7].

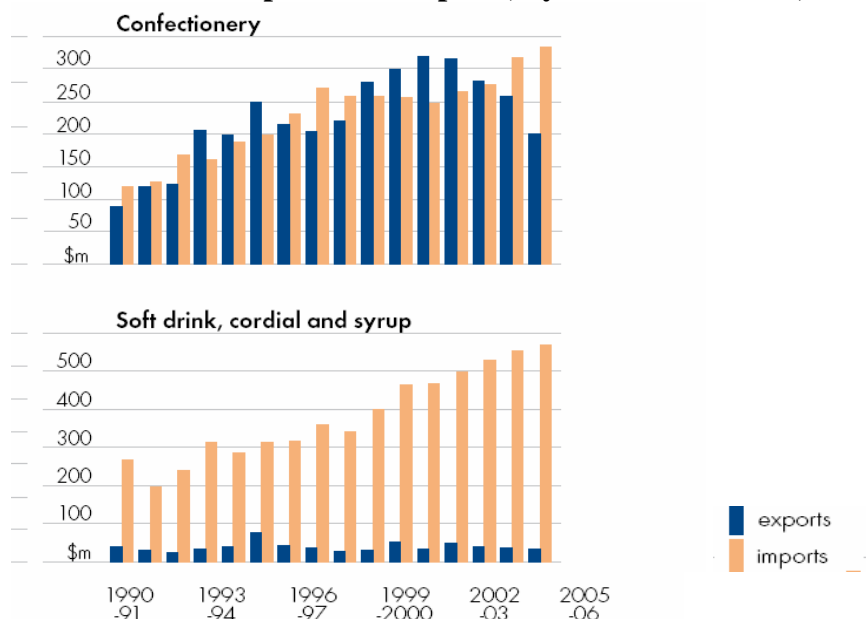
## AUSTRALIAN FOOD PRODUCTION

The value of Australia's total farm and fisheries production rose by almost 10% in 2005 to 2006, to about \$34.8 billion [8]. Food represents around 15 per cent of Australia's total merchandise exports, reporting a strong export performance of \$24 billion in 2005/6 [8]. The raise in the value of production orders from broad acre crop yields. Australian imports also increased in 2005-6 to 5%, a total of \$6.8 billion

Current overviews of the Australian food industry determine the “value” in terms of the economic value of food production, value added in food processing (including employment), food and liquor retailing turnover, and value of exports and imports.

The summary data provided in the Australian food statistics reporting 2006 highlights disproportionate and increasing emphasis on “value” of sale of unhealthy food products and limited consideration of “value” for health [8]. Australia exports significant amounts of live animals, fish, vegetables, fruit and nuts, grains, oilseeds, meats and dairy products. Conversely, processed (substantially and elaborately transformed) foods make up 95 per cent of the total value of food imports into Australia. Australia has significantly increased imports of processed fruits and vegetables, oil and fats, bakery products, confectionery and soft drink, cordial and syrups, the increasing the importing of these foods has been incremental over time since the 1990s in most cases, however substantially increases in bakery products confectionery and soft drinks have occurred over the last five to six years [8].

### Australian food exports and imports, by sector in 2005-06, dollars[8]



Dietary guidelines throughout the world recommend increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables and plain cereals, and reducing or limiting consumption of bakery products, fats and oils, confectionery and soft drinks. It is important to Australia to consider “value” for health when determining its import priorities.

The food industry in Australia have identified obesity as a major public health issue for the country. The challenge was seen that there would be an increasing pressure on the feature food companies to develop a proactive approach towards obesity and cited examples of fast food companies producing healthy and fresh foods and the increasing balance on menus. It could be considered, that these types of initiatives are driven more by market share niche potentials than commitments to comprehensive changes to the food supply to improve the availability of healthy diets.

### **Recommendation 2**

**Conduct a health impact assessment of the food system to identify actions that encourage food consumption consistent food based diet recommendations; increasing consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables and plain cereal foods is a key priority.**

### **Recommendation 3**

**Define and include a ‘value’ for health in the food production system, based on total diet intake, not on individual food components.**

## **HEALTH, DIET QUALITY AND FOOD BASED RECOMMENDATIONS**

Many of the national health priority health issues in Australia are diet-related and largely preventable, in particular cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and diabetes. Obesity is considered a disease and an increase in energy supply and consumption has made a major contribution to the obesity epidemic. Food and physical activity levels, are both a cause and a consequence of the obesity epidemic. In addition to addressing obesity, there are many other benefits of healthy eating besides weight management, and both physical activity and nutrition must be addressed together to improve the health of all Australians [9].

Diet quality is determined by the proportion of the population eating recommended intake of nutrients. In order to meet all the main population nutrient goals a diverse range of the key of different foods need to be consumed. No one food provides individual health benefits. Food eaten influence the energy and nutrient density of the diet. For example, to meet Australian dietary recommendations, a greater proportion of the proportion of the population need to eat a largely plant based diet. Regularly eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables leads to lower energy density diets, which are generally lower in total fat, higher in fibre, folate, calcium therefore increasing low energy density diets can assist to meet dietary recommendations.

Dietary guidelines encourage eating patterns to reduce the risk of diet-related disease and improve population well being. They provide the context for most nutrition

education initiatives. Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption is a core component of most dietary guidelines.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and Food and Agricultural Organisation called for member nations to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables [10] [11]. An International Fruit and Vegetables Alliance (IFAVA) was formed to encourage efforts to increase fruit and vegetable consumption globally [12]. Recently the UK called for a "national co-ordinated and sustained strategy to increase fruit and vegetable consumption" and that "such a strategy should tackle availability and access to fruit and vegetables well as changing attitudes and awareness" [13, 14].

The Australian dietary guidelines recommendations support environmental sustainability of the food supply. There is a need to increase the dissemination and uptake of this advice.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**Develop food production policies and strategies that encourage food consumption consistent with dietary guidelines; increasing fruit and vegetable consumption is a key priority.**

#### **Recommendation 5**

**Engage in the debate of the options that food production systems can undertake to address diet quality imbalances contribution to poor health. These include taking on some of the harder options relating to food law in Australia – particularly what and how is food produced or imported, changes to food advertising, promotion and distribution.**

### **FOOD SECURITY**

The has four dimensions: food availability, access to food, stability of supply and access and safe and healthy food utilization. Food security is a key factor in good nutrition [15]. One of the key elements to anti-hunger programs is to implement policies to improve physical and economic access by all to sufficient, nutritionally adequate, wholesome and safe food and its effective utilization.

Food insecurity is related to the cost of distribution and production of food, and biofuel policies. Food security has deteriorated since 1995 and reductions in child malnutrition are proceeding too slowly to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target for halving hunger by 2015. Three major challenges threaten to drastically complicate efforts to overcome food insecurity and malnutrition: climate change, the growing use of food crops as a source of fuel and soaring food prices.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**Develop food production policies and strategies that ensure food security, ensure healthy diets are affordable to all consumers, not just those who can pay more.**

### **Australia delivering on international commitments to food and health**

Food production, distribution and consumption is a global issue. World trade agreements mean that food produced in one country (under their food production laws) is frequently consumed outside the country of origin[15].

Present global food supplies are more than adequate to provide everyone with all the needed calories, if the food were equally distributed. But over 820 million people in developing countries have calorie-deficient diets. Even if a person consumes enough calories, this does not guarantee adequate intake of essential micronutrients – vitamins, minerals and trace elements[15].

Micronutrient malnutrition (“hidden hunger”) has serious public health consequences. For example, over one billion people consume diets deficient in iron. Iron deficiency is responsible for roughly half of the global prevalence of anaemia. Iron deficiency anaemia causes 20 percent of global maternal mortality, can impair children’s health and development and reduce adult work performance. Vitamin A deficiency disorders affect 40 million people causing blindness and contributing to infections and death[15].

### **Recommendation 7**

**Consider Australia’s food production policies and strategies in light of the world food supply, to ensure food security through equitable food distribution systems. Define and fulfil on Australia’s food donor obligations to enable healthy foods for all.**

### **We need to know how we are doing?**

Food production intelligence systems must be able to decide how Australia is going in terms of food related outputs that are important to the Australian community. This requires monitoring and evaluating the food system against the three cornerstones: food safety, food security (includes environmental) and diet (nutritional) quality. As health outcomes have slow progressions, this system needs to be ongoing and bi-partisan. Government leadership is required to develop and implement this system; intergovernmental taskforces may be required to set up the system and include an integrated approach to all three areas.

### **Recommendation 8**

**Support the development of an integrated food and nutrition monitoring system for Australia –outcomes include population and environment health.**

### **Recommendation 9**

**Develop and sustain systems to measure Apparent Consumption of Foods in Australia and household expenditure.**

### **Recommendation 10**

**Support research initiatives to consider whole of food supply chain initiatives to promote foods in line with food based dietary guideline recommendations.**

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